AFRICA RENEWAL

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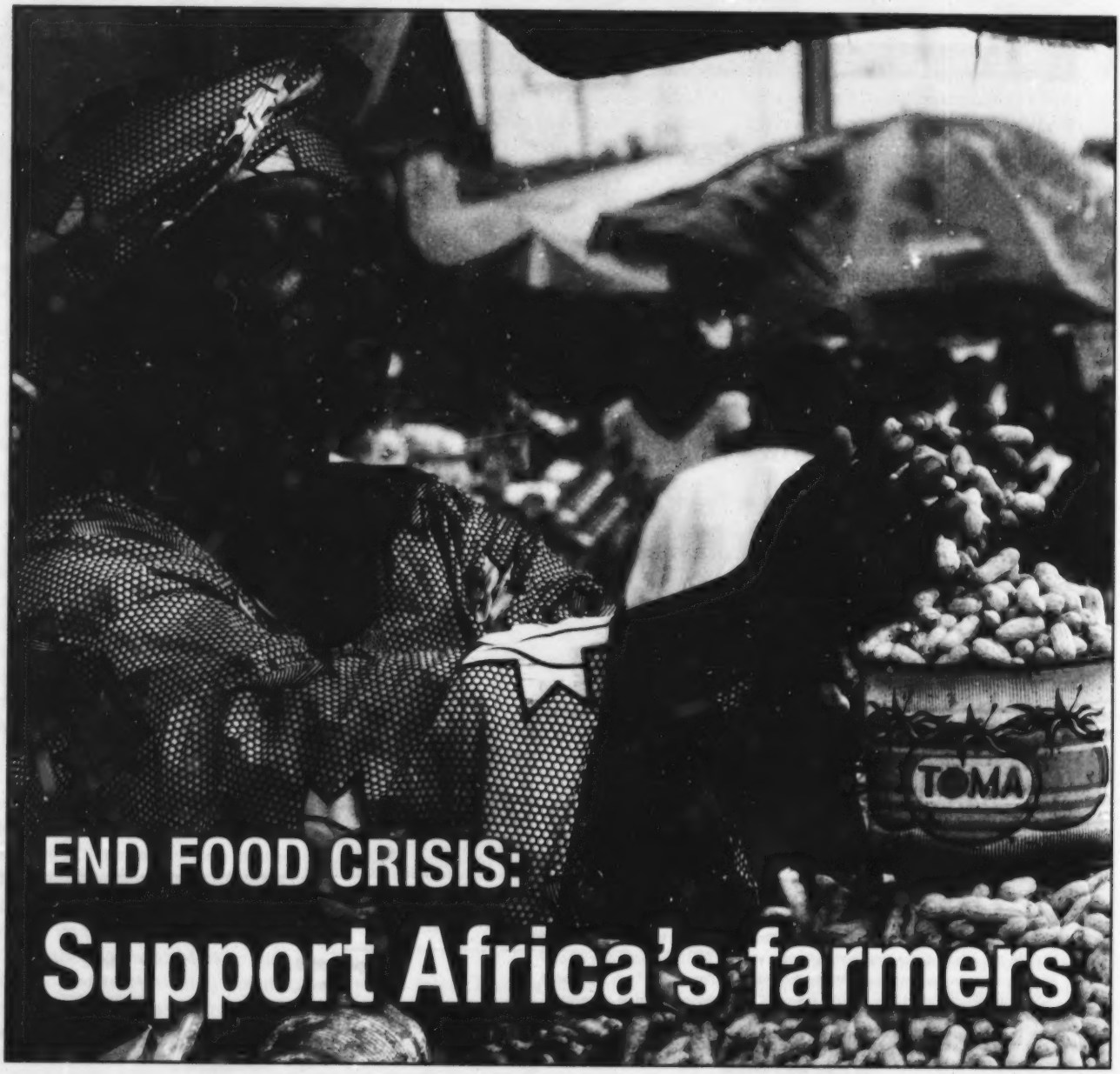

Panos / George Osodi

END FOOD CRISIS:
Support Africa's farmers

North African women advance despite obstacles

Attacking poverty, village by village | Africa seeks climate change funds

AFRICA RENEWAL

United Nations
Vol. 22 No. 2 July 2008

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Reuters / Normand Blouin

Only when "those excluded from the banquets of the rich took to the streets" did the world take notice, observed Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General Jacques Diouf.

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Africa seeks fair share of 'green' cash

Most climate change projects bypass continent

By **Michael Fleshman**

One of the great challenges facing scientists and political leaders in combating global warming is a difficulty that is, well, global. At first glance, that would not seem to be a problem at all. The fact that pollution released in the US or Europe is changing, sometimes disastrously, the climate of people thousands of kilometres away in Africa or Asia should bring the world together. After all, everyone is in the same ecological boat.

The catch is that not all countries contribute to or are affected by climate change in the same way. The industrial "greenhouse" gases that contribute to climate change, including carbon dioxide, come mostly from wealthy industrialized countries or rapidly growing economies, such as those in China and India. Poor developing countries without much industry, as in Africa, contribute little to the problem — but are hurt by it nonetheless. As Rajendra Pachauri, head of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, notes, the poor "are certainly going to be the worst sufferers," since they and their societies lack the money and technology to adapt.

Responsibility for climate change was an issue in the negotiations for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which requires polluters to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. Poor countries argued that they should not be penalized for problems caused by the rich. They called for negotiators to find ways to encourage wealthy countries to assist the poor with modern "green" technology and to help them cope with the effects of climate change. They also urged a balance between trying to reduce emissions and encouraging economic development, so as to lift billions of people in the developing South out of poverty.

Clean Development Mechanism

The solution to this looming North-South divide was found in the notion of "common but differentiated responsibility." Under that concept, all countries accept the obligation to combat global warming, but they do so within their means. At Kyoto, most developed countries agreed to cut their emissions to 5 per cent below 1990 levels, while at the same time exempting developing countries from mandatory reductions. They also agreed to an innovative financing measure called the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Its purpose is to reduce the cost of cutting emissions in the North while helping developing countries finance their own clean energy projects.

Peter Arnold Inc. / Sean Sprague

Replanting a maize field after a prolonged drought in Zambia: Climate change is hitting Africa especially hard.

The CDM is a private-sector initiative that allows businesses in developed countries to meet part of their domestic emissions targets by financing emissions-reducing projects in developing countries, where costs are often lower. A European company required by its government to reduce greenhouse gas discharges by 100,000 tonnes per year, for example, might find it cheaper to upgrade a polluting coal-burning power plant in India than to modernize its factory at home. The CDM allows that company to count the pollution averted in India against its 100,000-tonne target.

Such CDM-approved projects are assigned one "carbon emission reduction" credit (CER) for every tonne of greenhouse gas they save. CERs in turn can be sold on one of several international carbon exchanges — for instance, to a steel company in Germany, a cement factory in Sweden or a power plant in the UK, to help those countries meet their emissions-reduction requirements.

Cleaner power in Uganda

The possibilities of the CDM are great on a continent where population growth, climate change and lack of investment have contributed to chronic shortages of energy. For the residents of Uganda's rural West Nile region, generating energy for cooking, lighting and commerce was an expensive, dirty and sometimes frustrating experience until recently. Most households used kerosene or wood for day-to-day needs, while local businesses and the better off bought their own generators and diesel fuel for electricity, as the area was too remote and thinly settled to warrant connection to the national power grid. Kerosene and diesel had to be trucked in from distant depots over poor roads, adding to the cost and making supplies erratic.

The solution was to install a small hydroelectric plant on the nearby Nyagak

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Fighting African poverty, village by village

Innovative project in Ghana focuses on achieving Millennium goals

By **Ernest Harsch**
Bonsaaso

Standing in the midst of a freshly planted maize field, Bright Osei Kwaku recalls that last year he more than doubled his output with the help of improved seeds, fertilizer and advice on farming techniques. Altogether, his two to three acres yielded about 15 100-kilogramme bags of maize, compared with just six bags the year before, when he had no such support.

Many other young Ghanaians have either left agriculture or dream of doing so. But Mr. Kwaku, now 25 years old, thinks he can stay on the land. "I will continue to farm," he told *Africa Renewal*. "I got income and food. I got enough from the farm."

With world food prices rising, it is a good time to push for higher production, argues Isaac Kankam-Boadu, the agriculture and environment facilitator of the Millennium Villages Project in Bonsaaso, a cluster of poor and remote settlements in Ghana's Ashanti Region. "The high food prices are an opportunity," he says. "The farmers can earn more money."

Last year, Mr. Kankam-Boadu reports, Bonsaaso's maize farmers managed to quadruple their yields from an average of about one tonne per hectare (two and a half acres) to four tonnes. Besides boosting their own incomes, the farmers contributed about a tenth of their crop to the area's new school feeding programme, which helps many of the area's children.

Yasuyoshi Chiba

Nana Dapaah Siakwan, a village chief: Community organizations and the support of traditional leaders will be essential for ensuring the sustainability of the project when outside funding declines.

Millennium Villages

Such linkages are at the heart of the Millennium Villages Project. The first Millennium Village was launched in 2004 in Sauri, Kenya, as an integrated development initiative. Besides Ghana, the project soon expanded to also include villages in Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. The sites were selected on the basis of their poverty indicators and to represent Africa's different ecological and climate zones. Altogether, more than 400,000 people now live in villages chosen for the project.

The idea grew from research and policy deliberations of the Millennium Task Force, directed by the UN Secretary-General's special adviser on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Jeffrey Sachs. The MDGs, adopted by world leaders in 2000, strive to drastically reduce poverty and deprivation around the world.

The Millennium Villages approach is based on two central ideas: The first is that simple and inexpensive changes in nutrition, health, water, sanitation, education, women's status, agriculture, communications, roads and electricity can lift rural Africans out of severe poverty. The second is that a combination of community mobilization, government support and external aid can fund these efforts for only about $110 per person per year. Most of the Millennium Village projects are being implemented by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

Initial funders included the government of Japan, which gave more than $9 mn, and the US-based financier and philanthropist George Soros, who gave $5 mn. On 13 March, the Japanese government decided to extend its assistance by an additional $11.4 mn.

Japan's assistance to the project is part of that country's wider programme of support for Asia-Africa cooperation, known as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). The fourth conference was held in Yokohama, Japan, on 28–30 May, and was attended by Ghanaian President John Kufuor and nearly 40 other African heads of state (see page 6). Near the top of TICAD's agenda was achievement of the MDGs, which is also central to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Africa's own blueprint for economic, social and political progress.

From school meals to cell phones

The Millennium initiative came to Bonsaaso in March 2006, initially in 10 localities. By the end of that year the project had expanded to 30 communities, covering some 400 square kilometres and affecting more than 30,000 people. The area was selected because many residents were very poor, malnutrition was common, there were few health services, many children

did not go to school and numerous other indicators of human development lagged.

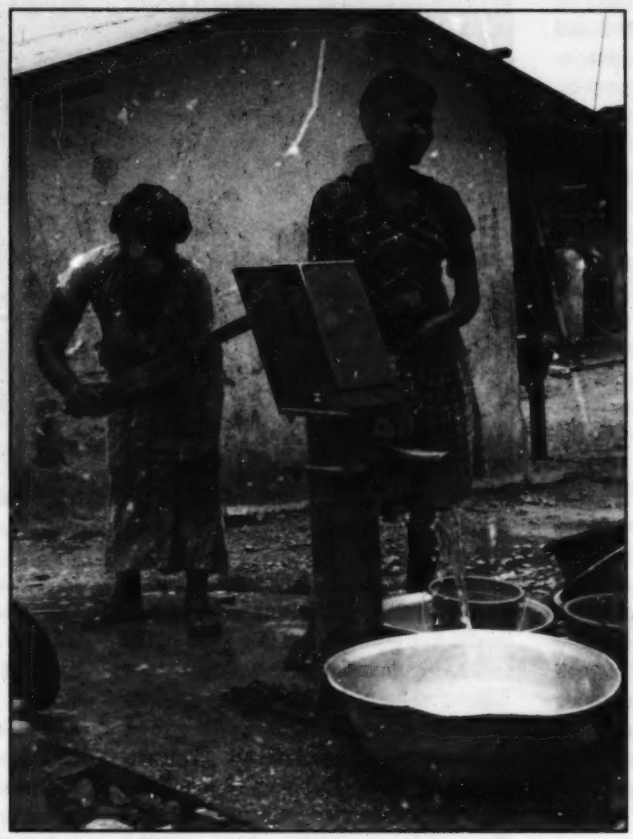
Rather than focusing on just one or two sectors, the project's designers want to show that poverty can be attacked across a wide front. If successful here and in other countries, says Sam Asare Afram, the Millennium Village manager in Bonsaaso, the project could provide a "model" for the continent.

Although the project is only two years old, communities in Bonsaaso are already enjoying real results. Rita Adjei, head nurse at the health clinic in Watreso, says that the new anti-mosquito bed nets mean that fewer children get malaria, although diarrhoea is still a serious problem caused by a lack of clean water and sanitation. She points to a bank of solar-powered chargers for cell phones, donated by Sony Ericsson. Once the Bonsaaso area comes under better cell phone coverage, Ms. Adjei and her assistant nurses will be able to quickly obtain better information and advice for their patients.

Nana Dapaah Siakwan, the traditional chief of Aboaboso, estimates that enrolment in the local primary school has increased from 200 to 500, largely thanks to the school feeding programme that began in March 2007. There also is a new health clinic. Until it opened, seriously ill patients had to be carried many kilometres along forest paths to a distant clinic—on a tabletop, since there was no stretcher, explains the chief. Now, he adds, "We have seen the benefits."

Mohammed Salifu, a cocoa farmer, produced nine 64-kilogramme bags in 2007, up from just four the year before, simply by following the advice of an agricultural extension officer sent to Bonsaaso by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. With new seedlings of a higher-yielding and faster-growing variety of cocoa, he hopes to do even better this year.

Bigger cocoa and food harvests will bring new challenges, however. The abysmal state of the roads within Bonsaaso and with other parts of Ghana makes it hard for farmers to get their crops to market. But Chinese road contractors hired by the government are busy at work, and the project has acquired two five-tonne trucks to help transport produce. Developing physical infrastructure is not one of the MDGs, notes Ernest Mensah, a project facilitator. "But if you want to eradicate poverty," he adds, "you need infrastructure."



UN Africa Renewal / Ernest Harsch

Expanding access to clean water is one of the goals of the Millennium Villages Project.

Avoiding dependency

Critics of donor-aided development projects in Africa point out that they often tend to make the beneficiaries dependent on outside assistance, and frequently collapse if that money eventually dries up. The Millennium Villages Project does rely on significant inflows. On average, about 60 per cent of project financing comes from donors, 30 per cent from national and local governments and the rest from the communities themselves.

In part, the project is designed to convince donors to provide more financing over the long term, by demonstrating concretely that aid can be used effectively to reduce poverty. A careful tally is kept of every dollar spent in Bonsaaso and other Millennium Villages, not only to avoid waste and inefficiency, but also to demonstrate to donor governments that simple interventions can make a real impact. "They don't know how practical the solutions are," says Mr. Sachs, referring to donor agencies. "They don't realize that at very low cost — just a few dollars — you can save children's lives."

By showing that external aid can indeed be effective in Africa, Mr. Sachs and his colleagues hope to convince the major industrialized countries to live up to their commitments. The 2005 summit meeting of the Group of Eight industrialized countries, for example, pledged to provide Africa with about $50 bn in aid annually by 2010 — still about twice what donors are giving so far.

To help guard against local expectations that such outside assistance will continue to keep the Millennium Villages functioning, project planners stress that certain forms of aid will be steadily reduced and that governments and villagers will need to take up a greater share of the cost. The new higher-yielding cocoa seedlings provided to farmers are currently subsidized, notes Mr. Kankam-Boadu. But as farmers earn more from their cocoa sales, by next year the subsidies will begin declining, "to let them know the realities of the market."

Similarly, health care in Bonsaaso's new clinics is free for the time being, to encourage poor villagers to use their ser-

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Japan summit promotes 'vibrant Africa'

More Asian support pledged for anti-poverty Millennium Goals

Building on its recent economic and political achievements, Africa is poised for a "century of growth" and may even become "a powerful engine driving the growth of the world," Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda said at the opening of a three-day summit of African and Asian leaders.

Held in Japan's port city of Yokohama 28–30 May, the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) drew some 40 African heads of state and government to refine strategies for further advancing the region's progress. The conference was co-organized by the government of Japan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) and the World Bank.

"Economic ties between Asia and Africa have expanded rapidly in recent years," UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro observed. Between 1990 and 2005, she noted, African exports to Asian countries have tripled, and Asia now accounts for more than a quarter of all African exports. Asia's foreign direct investment in Africa also grew rapidly, although from a small base.

Promoting such enhanced Asian-African cooperation has been a central goal of Japan since the first TICAD conference in 1993. The summit meetings, held at five-year intervals, have served not only to highlight Japan's own support for Africa, but have also provided a venue for other Asian countries to showcase their increasing engagement with the continent. In November 2006 China hosted a major summit with African leaders (see *Africa Renewal*, January 2007), and in April 2008 India also gave a major push to its relations with the region (see box).

Yasuyoshi Chiba

A mother and child in Ghana with insecticide-treated bed nets to protect against mosquitoes carrying malaria. Japan is financing projects to promote greater use of bed nets across Africa.

Tsuneo Kurokawa, head of the Africa section of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, distinguished TICAD's multilateral approach from China's recent bilateral initiatives. "The strength of TICAD," Mr. Kurokawa emphasized, "consists in the fact that it involves other parts of Asia and international organizations." He noted that the Yokohama conference included representatives from 12 Asian nations, 22 donor countries and 55 international organizations, including the UN, which has been

Bridging the Indian Ocean

More than a dozen African presidents and prime ministers joined with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on 8–9 April for the first India-Africa Forum. "The Indian Ocean has never been a barrier," observed Alpha Oumar Konaré, the outgoing president of the African Union Commission. "It is a route for travel and cooperation."

The same spirit featured in the participants' final declaration: "We are neighbours across the Indian Ocean." They noted that while African countries have made political and economic progress in recent years, India "has evolved into a more mature and fast-growing economic mode." Greater cooperation, therefore, can help both India and Africa "become more self-reliant [and] economically vibrant."

Trade between India and Africa is currently around $25 bn a year, nearly three times the level of just four years ago. Africa's share in India's total foreign trade rose from 5.8 per cent in 2002–03 to 8 per cent in 2006–07. At the forum, Prime Minister Singh observed that India accords duty-free access to most goods from least developed countries, 34 of which are in Africa. In 2003–04, India provided about $2.2 bn in trade credits to African countries, an amount that will increase to $5.4 bn in 2008–09. India's Export-Import Bank, which previously had an office in Johannesburg, South Africa, has recently opened another, in Dakar, Senegal.

India, Mr. Singh also pledged, will double the number of scholarships it gives to students from Africa, from about 4,000 to 8,000 annually. It will likewise increase the number of Africans to receive technical training from 1,100 to 1,600 each year.

President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal especially welcomed the measures to increase African exports to India. "It's a revolution," Mr. Wade declared, "since exports are the motor of development."

The participants from India and Africa also vowed to strengthen their cooperation in a wide range of other areas, from agricultural development to negotiations on multilateral trade and climate change. They agreed to hold the next India-Africa Forum in 2011.

a cosponsor since 1993.

Two other TICAD principles have been African ownership of the continent's development strategy and the establishment of a genuine partnership between Africa and its international supporters. These concepts are embodied in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), adopted by African leaders in 2001, noted the Yokohama Declaration issued by summit participants. NEPAD also had been endorsed by the previous TICAD conference, in 2003, as the framework for cooperation between Asia and Africa.

Infrastructure and MDGs

In order to boost Africa's economic growth, Prime Minister Fukuda told the summit, "The most important thing is the development of infrastructure." Reflecting NEPAD's own emphasis on this sector, the Yokohama Action Plan approved by the summit observed that building roads, ports, power systems, water facilities and other infrastructure will be vital for expanding industry, agriculture, trade and investment in Africa.

Advancing "human security" in Africa — one of the topics emphasized at the Yokohama summit — will also be essential for the continent's progress, participants agreed. However, they noted in the Yokohama Declaration that achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by world leaders in 2000 to reduce poverty and promote human well-being, "will be a difficult task." Ms. Migiro, the UN deputy-secretary-general, expressed concern that now, at the midpoint to the MDGs' target date of 2015, Africa is lagging. "Based on current trends," she said, "no African country is likely to achieve all the goals. An effective and immediate response is required."

One way to speed progress on the MDGs is to use existing resources in a more targeted and efficient way. The Yokohama summit highlighted community-based approaches such as the Millennium Villages Project, which is now in its pilot phase in 10 African countries (see page 4).

From aid to investment

TICAD participants also emphasized that the MDGs can be advanced if the donor countries fulfill the commitments they already have made to double assistance to Africa. That was one of the central messages that Japan has promised to convey to the next summit meeting of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrial nations, scheduled for Tokyo in July.

Prime Minister Fukuda announced that Japan will double its own official development assistance (ODA) to Africa over the next five years. According to estimates by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Japan disbursed $2.7 bn to sub-Saharan Africa in 2006 (the last year for which detailed statistics are available). In 2007, however, overall Japanese foreign aid fell by nearly a third, a slippage that was sharply criticized by Japanese civil society organizations in the lead-up to the TICAD conference.

Mr. Fukuda said that part of the increase in Japan's aid over the next five years will be in the form of $4 bn in soft loans for infrastructure development projects. Grants and technical assistance will be doubled. That technical assistance will include training 100,000 African health workers over the next five years and sending teams of water specialists to improve Africans' access to water sources.

In 2009 Japan will begin a contribution of $560 mn to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which provides about 60 per cent of its assistance to sub-Saharan Africa. This year Japan will also start funding a $10 bn "Cool Earth Partnership" to help African and other poor countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pursue environmentally sustainable development.

President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, speaking to the Yokohama summit as president of the African Union, saluted Japan's role in seeking to achieve global consensus on practical follow-up measures to the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Compared with other world regions, President Kikwete noted, Africa emits few of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming, but suffers a disproportionate share of the negative consequences of climate change.

Since Africa needs much more than aid inflows, the Tanzanian president expressed the hope that Japan, through the TICAD process, would do more to encourage private sector investment in the continent.

Prime Minister Fukuda announced that a new facility for African investment will soon be established within the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, to directly finance businesses in Africa, as well as to provide financing guarantees. Over the next five years, such financing should reach $2.5 bn. "Through such public-private collaborative activity," the Japanese prime minister added, "we are aiming to double Japanese private investment in Africa." ■

Fighting poverty

from page 5

vices. But, explains Mr. Afram, free care is not sustainable over the long term. Project workers therefore are helping villagers sign up for Ghana's national health insurance scheme.

In various ways, project organizers are encouraging national and local government bodies to expand their presence in Bonsaaso: by building roads, extending electricity connections and sending in more teachers, health care workers and agricultural extension advisers.

Building up community institutions and a spirit of self-help are also vital for long-term sustainability. Local residents regularly participate in the construction of new schools, teachers' quarters, clinics and community centres by providing labour and contributing sand, stones, timber and other construction materials.

The project employs several "facilitators" to help strengthen school management committees, parents' associations, water committees and other bodies, and to engage traditional chiefs, who play a major role in mobilizing people. Stephen Antwi, the project's community development coordinator, told *Africa Renewal* that community structures will help Bonsaaso keep developing even when outside aid eventually falls. "We'll likely have the capacity for many years." ■

Women in North Africa secure more rights

Despite hurdles, notable legal, political and social progress

By ***Mary Kimani***

Hayet Laouni is a member of Tunisia's senate and an owner of her own maritime business. She credits her success to the liberal approach to women's rights that the government has shown since independence, and to its investment in education. "I am very grateful to my country," she says. "I was born and grew up in a part of the world where life is supposed to be hard for most people, but harder for women. In fact, I come from two parts of the world, Africa and the Arab Muslim world."

She is not alone. In 2007, Tunisia was ranked the highest in North Africa by a "gender gap" index compiled by the World Economic Forum, headquartered in Switzerland. Examining women's school enrolment, access to jobs, earnings and other indicators around the world, the index also ranked women's status in Tunisia as the second highest among all Arab countries. However, on a global scale Tunisia was still near the bottom, ranking 102 out of 128 countries surveyed. Algeria came in at 108, Egypt at 120 and Morocco at 122.

A number of sub-Saharan countries did notably better in terms of women's rights and social position, with Ghana ranked at 63 and Kenya at 83. While North African countries appear to be doing poorly in relation to the rest of Africa, they have in fact witnessed a decade of substantial reform, achieving some progress in improving the status of women.

Reuters / Zohra Bensemra

Women demonstrate in Algeria for changes in the Family Code to allow them greater rights.

Reforming family codes

Much of the reform has been in these countries' "family codes," sets of laws guiding the role and status of women in marriage, as well as their rights in divorce and custody matters. The family code has been an important focus for women's rights activists because its laws are "absolutely critical and fundamental in Muslim society," says Mounira Charrad, a Tunisian-born professor at the University of Texas who has researched women's issues in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

Those laws, Ms. Charrad told *Africa Renewal*, "address issues that are at the

Countering violence and harassment

Violence against women is poorly legislated against and rarely prosecuted the world over. North Africa is no exception. Although Tunisia provides for the death penalty in cases of rape of girls under 10 years old, rape in Morocco is regarded as indecent assault or public indecency. In Egypt, domestic violence and marital rape are not considered crimes. Victims have to use other laws, such as battery or physical assault, if they wish to prosecute perpetrators.

But interpretations of Islamic shari'a law have sometimes proved flexible. In April 1998, during Algeria's civil war, the country's Supreme Islamic Council, the highest religious body, issued a fatwa (religious edict) permitting abortions by victims of war rapes, although abortion is not legal in most Muslim countries. But at the other extreme, about 30 women displaced by the war and seeking work in two oil towns were raped, killed and mutilated in 2001. The attacks were condoned by conservative clergy who claimed that since the women were travelling without a male escort, they were prostitutes. The attackers were never successfully prosecuted.

In 1999, Egyptian women's groups successfully lobbied to change a law that forgave rapists if they married the victims. The Ministry of Social Affairs subsequently put in place 150 family counselling centres to help victims.

The Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights conducted a survey in 2005 on the harassment of women walking in public. "At the time, it was impossible to talk about the issue," Ms. Rebecca Chiao of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights told *Africa Renewal*. "Even the word 'harassment' was not accepted. Nobody knew what it meant and they were offended by it." The centre then recruited volunteers to raise awareness on the issue. "We tried to be creative and innovative. Teachers talked to schools, journalists recorded advertisements for radio and we had music bands and film. Since then, we have seen substantial change."

core of social life." Successfully reforming them, she says, can improve women's marriage rights, access to divorce and ability to secure custody of their children.

Tunisia reformed its family code in 1957. However, it was only in 1993 in Tunisia (and a decade later in Algeria and Egypt) that a woman who married a foreigner could pass on her citizenship and nationality to her children. Prior to that, the children had to apply for residence permits just like any foreigner.

"When the present Tunisian government allowed a woman to pass on her citizenship to her children, this created a seismic cultural change in the society," Ms. Charrad told a panel convened in 2007 to mark the anniversary of the 1957 reforms. "Traditionally citizenship, as well as all other legal rights, was passed on through the father's side. By permitting citizenship to pass through the mother's line as well, the law challenged the entire patrilineal concept of the family."

Much of the credit for this progress lies with the emergence of dynamic and indigenous women's movements in North Africa during the 1980s and 1990s, explains Valentine M. Moghadam, head of the gender equality and development section of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Leila Rhiwi was the director of one such group in Morocco, Printemps de l'égalité (Spring of Equality). Women in North Africa today enjoy more rights and protections than 20 years ago, she told *Africa Renewal*. "Then it was very different. At that time women did not have any power over their own lives."

But progress has been halting and uneven. In 2005 Egypt granted women expanded divorce rights. But efforts to change the law to allow women to travel without the permission of a husband or father were dropped by the government for fear that they were too radical to pass.

Ms. Rhiwi, who is currently the women's rights coordinator for Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (a region known as the Maghreb) for the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) observes that there have been different degrees of progress in Morocco compared with Algeria and in the Maghreb countries compared with Egypt. "What we have seen is a change in the law, not a change in society. However, changes in law allow for changes to occur in the society."

Between law and practice

Ms. Charrad agrees. "The law has made a difference in countries like Tunisia, where reforms happened in the 1950s. There we have had a length of time to see the changes. We know now that when the laws change, women are able to file for divorce more easily and custody is easier."

"What the law does not change is the social situation," she told *Africa Renewal*. "Socially, divorce remains very difficult. They [divorced women] suffer economically, and they find themselves treated as outcasts."

In recent years women in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have secured more rights, greater access to education and a modest increase in their political representation.

Ms. Moghadam notes that the countries of North Africa continue to be marked by social practices that not only discriminate against women and are inconsistent with international treaties, but also contravene their own national laws. "Egypt's constitution grants equality to all citizens," she points out. But Egypt's family law contradicts that equality "by placing women under the guardianship," or legal control, of their fathers, husbands or other family males.

The 2005 *Human Development Report on Arab States*, published by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), observes that "the business of writing the law, applying the law and interpreting the law in the Arab world is governed above all by a male-oriented culture." Yet countries like Tunisia show that it is possible, in a Muslim country, to address "the injustices against women in personal status matters without infringing upon the principles of shari'a," as the Islamic legal code is known.

"We can no longer say that in the Muslim world it is hard to change women's rights," comments Ms. Charrad. "Women have really gained very significant rights in Tunisia and Morocco."

"We need to move away from the generalized statements about that part of the world and come up with a more nuanced way of looking at it," Ms. Charrad adds. "Once we see the diversity of the experiences of women in the Muslim world and see that some women have gained substantial rights, we can learn from those cases."

Rights limited by 'guardianship'

Caroline Sakina Brac de la Perrire, a social scientist who conducted research on Algeria for a 2004 study on women's rights in North Africa and the Middle East by Freedom House, a US-based group, argues that Islamic doctrine provides women with tools that they can use to counter conservative social practices. For example, under Islamic law a marriage contract may allow each spouse to state in writing his or her specific rights in the marriage. Used properly, she maintains, this provision could serve to guarantee some rights for women in marriage.

Unfortunately, Ms. Perrire adds, this option is rarely used and is usually restricted to stipulations that do not contravene shari'a. Moreover, many women do not contract their own marriages and therefore have no control over what is guaranteed in writing.

Until 2004, an Algerian woman needed a male guardian (father, brother or uncle) to formalize her marriage on her behalf. In Egypt, another researcher found, while educated girls have a substantial say in choosing their husbands, in the rural areas marriages are often contracted by the fathers. Libyan girls can still be married off by the father or guardian without their input.

Such "male guardianship," the Freedom House study notes, also has implications for women's economic welfare. For example, the dowry, money paid by the groom, conforms to Islamic stipulations that the man provide for the bride and is often the only income a woman can keep in case of divorce. But in Morocco and Egypt, poor women often receive little or no dowry. A national survey found that 60.7 per cent of rural women in Morocco reported that "their husbands or guardians appropriated" such income.

Moreover, women can often be

divorced by their husbands immediately and without explanation, a practice known as "repudiation." Only in 2004 did Algeria abolish repudiation as a form of divorce. Morocco, which previously made it easier for men to divorce their wives, granted men and women equal rights to file for divorce in 2004.

Reuters / Tara Todras-Whitehill

Eman el-Emam (centre) was one of about 30 women judges sworn onto the bench in April 2007 in Egypt. Conservative groups opposed the appointments, but the country's highest Muslim legal authority ruled that the move did not violate Islamic law.

In Egypt, a law passed in 2005 granted women the right to a no-contest divorce. However, a woman who exercises that right may lose her dowry, alimony and other gifts given by the man's family, a serious deterrent for women with few economic options.

Legal assistance

Some governments, in response to the advocacy efforts of women's organizations, have made institutional changes to ensure better access to justice. Egypt introduced a new system of administering child support and alimony and has brought divorce and inheritance issues under one judicial authority. Victims of discrimination can also send confidential complaints to a new gender ombudsman's office, which has received 7,000 complaints since 2005.

Rebecca Chiao of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights told *Africa Renewal* that since the changes were implemented in Egypt, her group has held an average of 6,000 consultations annually with women seeking legal assistance in understanding and using the new regulations.

Reform of inheritance practices has been minimal. According to shari'a law, women are entitled to inherit a share that is half that of their brothers. But in Egypt and Libya, reports the Freedom House study, women's access to inheritance, housing and property is often determined by their educational level, family support systems, economic status and access to legal information and mechanisms. As a result some women, especially in rural areas, do not even get their half share. Moreover, non-Muslim women married to Muslims cannot inherit matrimonial property.

"Inheritance laws are very explicit in the Koran," observes Ms. Charrad. "For most people, to change them is to question a fundamental piece of the religion. In contrast, marital and divorce laws in the Koran are less explicit, therefore much more fluid and open to varying interpretations."

Reproductive rights

Overall, women in North Africa have made important progress in reproductive rights — in fact, notably better than in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Tunisian law protects the right of a woman to decide whether to practice birth control or have an abortion. Estimates by the World Health Organization indicate that contraceptive use in Tunisia grew from 24 per cent in 1980 (the current rate in most of sub-Saharan Africa) to 63 per cent in 2007. Nearly all Tunisian women live within 5 kilometres of a source of family planning and they typically wait until about age 27 to get married, compared to about age 16 in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

In Egypt, 96 per cent of women live near a family planning centre and about 60 per cent use the centres' services. The Algerian government has created an innovative family planning policy that reimburses people for purchasing contraceptives. More than 90 per cent of births in Algeria and Tunisia take place in public health facilities, drastically reducing maternal and child mortality in those countries.

One persistent problem in Egypt is female genital mutilation (FGM) of girls 7-10 years old. Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, a researcher for the Freedom House report, notes that while the practice has been illegal there since 1996, it remains common. "Egyptians widely believe FGM to be an Islamic practice," she has reported, "even though it is also performed by Egyptian Christians and is not practiced in most Muslim countries outside the Nile valley."

Ms. Moghadam notes that many laws in North Africa and the Middle East are seen as directly resulting from Islamic injunctions, while they in fact derive from tribal or pre-Islamic cultural practices. In a study on women and Islam for UNDP, she cites the veiling and seclusion of women, controls over women's sexuality, male privilege and parents' preference for sons, all of which reinforce current norms and laws.

Politics: a male preserve

One area in which male dominance is especially notable is political representation. Morocco got its first senior female political figure in 1997, a secretary of state in the cabinet. Since then there have been few others. Moroccan parties agreed in 2002 to reserve 30 seats out of 325 for women in parliament. In 2004 Algerian women comprised almost 20 per cent in the upper house of that country's legislature, while in Egypt women make up

Women organize and forge alliances

North African activists reach out to Islamic clerics

By ***Mary Kimani***

In recent years women in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have secured more rights, greater access to education and a modest increase in their political representation. But entrenching those achievements will require joint advocacy by women's organizations, governments and religious groups, argues Leila Rhiwi of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). "To guarantee and consolidate the gains of the last few years we must follow through with the application of the reforms," she told *Africa Renewal*. "If you do not have advocacy, then no change happens because institutions are always reluctant to change."

The need for concerted effort is even more acute in the face of growing opposition by conservative groups and clerics who claim that such initiatives violate Islamic law or are contrary to the Koran. Such opposition in North Africa, Ms. Rhiwi says, reflects the wider spread of conservative trends throughout the Muslim world. "Ideas coming through the media and especially satellite television are affecting us," she explains. "In Morocco, most of the people discussing women's rights in the media have conservative interpretations of the law. There is an absence of progressive voices."

Resistance and backlash

Ms. Valentine Moghadam, a gender specialist at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), observes that the "political discourse in Egypt is dominated by the conservative polemics of the Islamists."

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, a researcher on the region, has reported that Morocco's adoption of a new family law in 2003-04 "won the king much credit among liberals and women." Louisa Dris-Ait-Hamadouche, another researcher, has noted that as a result of contradictory conservative and liberal interpretations of shari'a law, debate over the role of women in North Africa "moves back and forth between secular values and religious (and traditional) principles."

Support from clerics

Women's groups have learned to adapt to differing situations, explains Ms. Rhiwi. "They are very strong, they know the culture. They know the religious context in which they live and can use either universal human rights arguments or religious arguments for their cause." Most often, Ms. Rhiwi adds, "to succeed we must find clerics with progressive interpretations of the Koran to support us."

Such support does exist. When the Egyptian government in 2004 appointed a female judge to the Supreme Court, conservative groups attacked the move as a violation of Islamic law. When the government named 30 more women judges three years later, there were further denunciations. That reaction prompted the government to ask for a ruling on the legitimacy of the nominations from Al Azhar University, the Muslim world's oldest seat of religious learning and the highest authority on Islamic law in Egypt. The mufti of Al Azhar ruled that the appointments did not violate Islamic law.

The mufti had previously judged that Islam allowed equal opportunities for men and women to end unhappy marriages, a ruling that helped efforts by the government and women's groups to change Egypt's marriage and divorce laws.

Women's organizations in Morocco have also sought to work closely with clerics, Ms. Rhiwi reports. "We needed society to understand that the conservative clerics were not the sole interpreters of Islam." Through such partnerships, she adds, women's organizations were able to obtain Islamic rulings that supported legal changes, such as increasing the age at which women may legally marry, granting women and men equal rights in marriage and divorce and securing women's custodial rights to their children.

Ms. Rhiwi believes that continued advocacy by women's groups is vital. "We realized this is crucial after noticing that most resistance to the implementation of new laws came from the very men and women charged with putting a new system in place," she says. "We have to do a lot of training of judges and people working in the legal system, to mobilize people and educate them."

Nevertheless, Ms. Rhiwi is confident that the advances made by women in North Africa are here to stay. "We do recognize that there are conservative voices out there. But we know there are also progressive voices. I don't think we can regress now. I think we are at a good place in the process. But the equilibrium is very fragile." ■

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a meagre 8 per cent in both houses and there are few women in cabinet posts.

Women have fared better in the judiciary. Algeria has 800 women judges, about half the total in the country. There are also 1,065 women lawyers out of a total of 6,400. In Tunisia, women make up 27 per cent of judges and 31 per cent of lawyers.

Public attitudes appear to support such trends. A Gallup poll published in August 2007 found that 75 per cent of Moroccans, 70 per cent of Tunisians, but just 51 per cent of Algerians believe women should hold cabinet-level leadership posts in government.

Ms. Rhiwi cautions that while women's representation remains limited at the national level, the problem is worse locally, noting that in Morocco women make up less than 1 per cent of local government officials. "We have done a lot at the national level," she says. "Now we have to do the same at the local level."

Moreover, she notes, women's representation nationally is not legally fixed, but simply a result of political parties' agreement to observe quotas for women. "We hope to get it entrenched in the law. We have to also ensure that the changes will be real, effective and institutionalized." ■

Africa struggles with soaring food prices

From emergency reactions to farming investments

By **Michael Fleshman**

The protests against soaring food prices that swept dozens of countries around the world earlier this year have shaken governments and international aid agencies. They have also prompted a flurry of activity to lower the cost of basic staples and expand farm production.

Addressing an emergency summit on the global food crisis in Rome in June, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscored the threat to political stability and development. "Nothing is more degrading than hunger, especially when man-made. It breeds anger, social disintegration, ill health and economic decline," he told world leaders. "Only by acting together, in partnership, can we overcome this crisis, today and for tomorrow. Hundreds of millions of the world's people expect no less."

Amid signs that prices for some foods have begun to drop, and with billions of dollars pouring into humanitarian agencies for food aid, seeds and fertilizer, fears of famine in the poorest countries are easing. But the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned that a combination of high oil prices, increased consumption, climate change and growing use of agricultural produce for fuel may mean that the era of cheap global grain supplies is over for good. Unless the world reverses decades of neglect of small-scale farming in African and other developing countries and transforms the way food is grown, harvested and sold, FAO cautions, the current crisis could become permanent and future generations will be hungrier — and angrier — than those of the past.

Reuters/ Normand Blouin

Only when "those excluded from the banquets of the rich took to the streets" did the world take notice, observed Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General Jacques Diouf.

Skyrocketing prices

The price rises have been most pronounced with the cereal crops — maize, wheat, rice, sorghum and millet — that comprise the basic diet of billions of people. They have also hit feed for cattle, chickens and other meat-producing animals. The price of wheat on world markets rose 130 per cent between March 2007 and March 2008, while rice increased by nearly 90 per cent and maize by nearly a third during that period. Prices for other foodstuffs, including vegetable oil, which went up by 97 per cent, and dairy products, which went up by 58 per cent, have kept pace.

The FAO reports that its overall price index for basic foods, which increased 8 per cent during 2005–06, rose by 24 per cent in 2007. During the first three months of 2008 they were a staggering 53 per cent higher than in the same period the year before.

The price hikes have fallen hardest on the poor in the 82 nations designated by the United Nations as low-income food deficit countries (LIFDCs). Forty-two of those are in Africa. Many of these countries already suffer high rates of hunger and malnutrition and rely on imported food even in good times. Their governments can do little to cushion their citizens from price shocks, lacking funds for subsidies or emergency feeding programmes.

Since food costs typically absorb half or more of family incomes in such countries, many urban dwellers and the poorest farming families have little choice but to switch to cheaper, less nourishing foods, or to skip meals altogether. Consumers in many parts of Africa have started turning to locally grown foods as import prices rise. But even local produce has gotten more costly — in part because of surging fuel costs for transport and processing, but also because of limited supplies and increased demand.

With African agriculture hampered by declining productivity, rising population and low levels of investment (see *Africa Renewal*, July 2006), the region has little choice but to continue importing food. The UN reports that the total cereal import bill of African LIFDCs rose by more than half in 2007, an increase of more than $7 bn. The burden for 2008 is expected to be even greater, with cereal prices for Africa's most import-dependent countries expected to increase by 74 per cent, to about double what those countries paid two years ago.

Economists caution that such increases could add 100 million people to the 850 million around the world who are already chronically malnourished. They can also contribute to balance-of-payments prob-

lems and worsen debt in the poorest countries. After posting strong economic growth rates in recent years, Africa could see those gains literally eaten up by higher food costs.

Multiple causes

The factors driving the dramatic increases in food prices over the past two years are numerous and still very much debated. Much of the rise has been blamed on the use of maize and other food crops for brewing ethanol and other biofuels for the transport industry. But it is the combination of biofuel production with many other developments that is pushing up prices, agriculture economist Joachim von Braun, director-general of the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, told *Africa Renewal*. Those factors include:

- Rising oil prices, which ripple throughout the farm economy, affecting transportation, fertilizer and processing costs.
- Improved living standards in China, India and parts of Latin America, leading to increased meat consumption and thus higher demand for grain for animal feed.
- Poor weather in major food exporting countries, including years of drought in the Australian wheat belt and flooding in major US maize- and wheat-producing areas.
- Increased speculation in agricultural commodity markets by large investors. The FAO estimates that commercial investment in farm commodities has increased more than tenfold to $150 bn in the past four years, inflating food prices as investors turn to agricultural commodities that promise high returns amid sharp downturns in other parts of the troubled world economy.
- Decades of underinvestment and declining yields in agriculture in African and other poor countries, which increases demand for limited world food supplies and limits the world's ability to produce more.

"None of these factors in isolation would have caused the very high increases we are seeing," Mr. von Braun said. "Together they are a creating a very risky situation."

The coming together of these different influences on food production and pricing, and the way they interact by means of the global economy, pose difficult challenges for national and intergovernmental policymakers. Biofuels provide an example. One consequence of the use of food crops for biofuels, beyond the diversion of food from people to cars, Mr. von Braun noted, is that it links world prices for maize and other food to the runaway price of oil. Higher oil prices increase demand for biofuels, forcing consumers in poor countries to bid against energy producers for food crops, thereby driving prices still higher. The UN estimates that 30 per cent of the maize harvested in the US, the world's largest producer, will go to fuel production in 2008.

"The complex causes of the food and agriculture crisis require an equally complex and comprehensive response," noted Mr. von Braun. He told the UN Economic and Social Council in May that solving the current crisis will require a mix of short-term policies to make more food available immediately and long-term initiatives to reduce global inequality, reform damaging farm subsidy and trade policies and increase farm production and self-sufficiency in African and other chronically food-deficient areas.

From neglect to action

The FAO cautions, however, that high food prices are likely to continue for at least the next decade, and that the long era of large world food surpluses and cheap exports that began with the Green Revolution in Asia in the 1960s may be over for good. For now at least, there are signs of improvement. Since the beginning of the year more than $18 bn in cash and commodities has been pledged by donors to meet the food crisis, including $500 mn from Saudi Arabia, $5 bn over two years from the US and $1.2 bn in low-interest loans and grants from the World Bank.

The UN's World Food Programme, the world's largest food aid agency, announced that it now has the resources to provide additional assistance to 90 million people in the 40 countries hit hardest by the food price rises, mostly in Africa. The new funds will also allow FAO to expand its pilot $17 mn Initiative on Soaring Food Prices. Originally targeted to provide fertilizer, farm implements and improved seeds to family farmers in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique and Senegal, the initiative will expand to another 40

Grain prices have risen sharply in Africa, hitting the poor especially hard since they must spend a large portion of their incomes on staple foods.

Reuters / Ed Harris

countries that have requested assistance. The UN's response will be directed by the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, which was launched by Secretary-General Ban in May.

On the ground, African governments have attempted to reduce prices for basic foods in a number of ways, depending on local circumstances and their own resources. In Senegal, which relies on imports for half of the cereals it consumes, the government announced subsidies of 40 per cent on wheat flour, suspended food tariffs and imposed some price controls. Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire have also waived duties on imported staples. In Ethiopia, where drought is already threatening widespread hunger, the government has introduced a wide range of emergency programmes. These include suspension of the value-added tax (which falls indirectly on consumers) on grain and flour, new subsidies for wheat and the continuation of emergency rations to 800,000 people in the cities.

In South Africa, a major maize exporter and one of the few large African producers of biofuel, the government has capped the use of maize for ethanol production and expanded cash grants to the most vulnerable. Tanzania has lifted duties on an additional 300,000 tonnes of maize imports and has banned food exports.

Ghana announced a $1 bn aid package for hard-pressed consumers, including lifting levies on food and fuel imports, cancelling taxes on fuel for the fishing fleet and subsidizing fertilizer and other inputs for farmers. Combined with a fourfold increase in energy costs and lost revenue from tax cuts, this initiative "is throwing the budget out of gear," Ghanaian President John Kufuor told the nation on 22 May. It will reduce available funding for national development programmes. But such new spending is necessary, he said, to expand food production and protect the living standards of the most vulnerable.

Economists have criticized the imposition of export bans by major suppliers, particularly rice exporters, to protect local consumers, arguing that export controls only further restrict global supplies and drive prices higher. Price controls have also come under fire because, experts say, they are difficult to enforce, encourage the development of black markets and reduce price incentives for local farmers to grow more.

With fears of famine and street protests easing and prices for rice and some other commodities on the decline, export controls are being lifted in some countries and the focus is turning to what everyone agrees is the long-term solution to the price crisis — increasing production and food security in the poorest and hungriest nations.

Panos / Jenny Matthews

Farmer in Niger: The only long-term solution to high food prices is to help rural Africans grow more food.

Disaster foretold

The fury in the streets over the food crisis may have succeeded in prodding the world into emergency action. But only time will tell whether the demonstrators have shocked their leaders into finally tackling the crisis in global agriculture. Addressing the Rome summit, FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf reminded the assembled heads of state and government that they had been at this point before, in 1996 and again in 2002, promising both times to end world hunger.

"The facts speak for themselves," Mr. Diouf said. "From 1980 to 2005 aid to agriculture fell from $8 bn . . . to $3.4 bn.... Agriculture's share of official development assistance fell from 17 per cent in 1980 to 3 per cent in 2006." This was despite the fact that farming provides the sole livelihood for 70 per cent of the world's poor. The sometimes violent protests that erupted around the world in recent months, he said, were "but the chronicle of disaster foretold."

Africa, Mr. Diouf noted, has made efforts to reverse the decline in agriculture. Its leaders adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001, and within two years had drafted a detailed and comprehensive agriculture plan to restore depleted soils, increase harvests and lift millions out of poverty. Some 50 African countries, he continued, developed national agriculture reform programmes in conjunction with FAO, actions also taken by governments in poor countries elsewhere in the world.

African leaders meeting under the auspices of the African Union in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2003 also pledged to devote at least 10 per cent of their national budgets to agriculture and rural development by the end of 2008, as well as to rebuild domestic grain stocks and cooperate with farmers' and other civil society groups on agricultural policy. The African Union reported in June 2008 that domestic investment in agriculture has increased in most countries over the past five years, and that about 10 countries have met or exceeded the 10 per cent spending target.

The increases, often accompanied by changes in government policies to strengthen support for small-scale farming, have produced some encouraging increases in food production. The most dramatic improvements have come in

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Price protests expose state faults

Rioting and repression reflect problems of African governance

By **Ernest Harsch**

Cheikh Diouf, from the rural community of Diakhao, walked out of a courtroom in Dakar in mid-April a free man. He was found not guilty of charges that he had "disturbed order" in Senegal's parliament. The week before, he had managed to slip past security guards at the country's National Assembly. As parliamentary deputies, during a break in their deliberations, walked to a restaurant in the building, Mr. Diouf brandished an empty rice sack on which he had written "The people are hungry."

Elsewhere in Dakar — and in nearly a dozen other African countries — most protesters have not been quite as restrained. Angered by sharply rising prices of basic foodstuffs, transport, electricity and other essentials, they have poured into the streets to express their frustrations and demand that their governments act quickly to halt the spiraling cost of living. Street barricades, burning tyres, arson and sometimes deadly confrontations with riot police have been common.

Jacques Diouf, the Senegalese director-general of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, warns that unless something significant is done to bring down world grain prices, "hunger riots" will likely increase around the world. Already 37 countries are threatened by food crises, he reports. If people feel they are facing starvation, "They will not let themselves die without doing something. They will react."

But in some countries with equally severe food situations, governments have successfully averted public demonstrations by being responsive to popular concerns. Niger, an arid Sahelian country, was swept by mass protests during an earlier food crisis in 2005. The government then set up a cabinet-level ministry to coordinate action on prices. "So when prices went up this year," Moustapha Kadi, an activist in the earlier demonstrations, told the *New York Times*, "the government acted quickly to remove tariffs on rice, which everyone eats. That quick action has kept people from taking to the streets."

'Enough is enough!'

The most immediate issue for many ordinary Africans has been the sudden increase in recent months in the prices of basic consumer goods. Climbing fuel costs have been felt widely, stoking inflation in general. The rise in prices of staple foods has been especially sharp, and has disproportionately hurt poor people, who must spend a bigger share of their meagre incomes on food than the better off. Government officials have frequently sought to blame external factors beyond their immediate control: rising world grain and oil prices, poor weather and an unfair international trading system that undermines agriculture in developing countries (see page 12).

However valid such explanations, the protests also reflect deep popular dissatisfaction with the way many African political systems function. Some countries swept by riots are run by autocratic or semi-authoritarian leaders who have been in power for many years and provide little room for opposition. Critics charge that the governments of these countries are inefficient, riddled with corruption and indifferent to the plight of ordinary people. If problems such as the high cost of living are to be addressed, they argue, there must be political change and greater democracy.

Even in countries such as Senegal that generally hold free elections and have had alterations in government, many people still feel they have little voice in influencing policy — unless they go out into the streets.

Reuters / Normand Blouin

Hunger protest in Senegal: In many countries, demonstrators have combined demands for lower food prices with calls for greater democracy and other political reforms.

"Enough is enough! Prices are rising daily," Adama Ouédraogo, a small-scale merchant, explained during violent protests in the town of Ouahigouya in Burkina Faso. "And since we have no channel for communicating with the authorities, we have chosen the streets to show our discontent."

From Conakry to Cairo

In several countries, the price protests seemed to first erupt around the same time, in February and March, following an abrupt spike in food prices from the beginning of the year. However, here and there signs of unrest and agitation were

already evident earlier.

Morocco was hit by two waves of sit-ins to protest high food prices in March and September 2007, the latter including violent clashes in Sefrou that left 50 injured; more clashes broke out in April in Rabat, in front of Morocco's parliament.

Nouakchott and at least nine other towns in **Mauritania** exploded in protests in November 2007, as hungry people looted food stores and, in some instances, attacked police stations. At least one demonstrator was killed when security forces sought to disperse a crowd.

The most dramatic of the early protests were in **Guinea**, in January and February 2007, when anti-government demonstrations led to a crackdown that claimed nearly 200 lives and provoked a deep crisis. The grievances were both political and economic, combining dissatisfaction with the government and popular dismay over worsening living conditions. Sporadic demonstrations flared throughout that year, and in mid-February 2008 rioting over high food prices broke out again in Ratoma, just outside the capital, Conakry.

At the beginning of February, a protest in Maputo, the capital of **Mozambique**, over hikes in bus fares and bread prices set off a series of violent clashes in the country, reportedly leaving six people dead and more than 100 injured.

From 20–21 February, three cities in **Burkina Faso** (Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouahigouya and Banfora) were hit by violent riots prompted by high food prices and increased government efforts to collect taxes from small-scale merchants. Large crowds of petty traders, youths and other urban poor turned their anger against public buildings, vehicles, shops, uniformed security personnel, traffic lights, a statue of the president and other symbols of authority. A week later, on 28 February, several poor neighbourhoods erupted in Ouagadougou during a strike against high prices.

More than 1,500 kilometres away, in **Cameroon**'s port city of Douala, taxi drivers struck on 24 February to protest high fuel costs. That set off severe rioting in half of the country's 10 provinces. Government officials later reported that government buildings had been burned, vandalized or looted in 31 towns, and that some 40 people were known to have been killed.

After an earlier spate of demonstrations in late 2007 in **Senegal**, and more recent public declarations by unions and civil society groups appealing for a halt to rising prices, two consumers' associations called a march and sit-in on 30 March in Dakar. Their banners proclaimed "We are hungry" and "Dundu bi cherna" (life has become difficult). A riot police assault set off three hours of street clashes. More protests followed in April, including by some of the country's trade unions.

Reuters / Normand Blouin

Where governments have opened dialogue with trade unions and other civil associations, protests against high food prices have been more orderly.

On the last day of March, some 1,500 protesters marched in the Cocody and Yopougon districts of Abidjan, **Côte d'Ivoire**'s largest city, chanting "We are hungry" and "Life is too expensive, you are killing us." Riot police moved in to disperse the crowds and one person was reportedly killed.

In **Egypt**, calls for a general strike spread in early April amidst growing public anger over high bread prices. Sporadic demonstrations erupted in Cairo, and riot police clashed with protesters in the northern town of Mahalla al-Kobra, the centre of the nation's textile industry, where at least one person was killed. More protests took place in June.

On 10 April, the town of Redeyef in central **Tunisia**'s phosphate-mining region was rocked by clashes between police and demonstrators protesting rising living costs and high unemployment. In late April, civil society groups in **Gabon** also staged demonstrations against the high cost of living.

Although Africa has accounted for a notable share of the recent price protests, the continent has not been alone. Sizeable demonstrations were reported in Indonesia, Yemen and most notably Haiti, where a number of people were killed.

For freedom and bread

In most demonstrations, protesters have expressed anger not only over high food and fuel prices, but also towards the governments they hold responsible. The linking of political and economic grievances has been most evident where the same presidents and ruling parties have been in power for many years.

President Lansana Conté of Guinea has held office for a quarter-century, since he staged a military coup in 1984. Although the popular uprisings of 2007 prompted some concessions, the political reform process appears to have stalled. Protesters have cited, in particular, the government's failure to name a commission of inquiry into police killings of demonstrators last year.

During the price protests in Cameroon, demonstrators also decried human rights abuses and plans by the ruling party to amend the 1996 constitution to make it possible for President Paul Biya, who has been in office since 1982, to run yet again for the presidency when his current term expires in 2011. The National Assembly approved the amendment on 10 April. Although opposition deputies staged a walkout to protest the move, there was

little immediate public outcry. The government had simultaneously enacted several measures to bring down the prices of basic necessities, dissipating some of the anger on that issue.

Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso has been president since a military coup in 1987. Although opposition and civil society pressure led to a shift to multiparty elections in 1991, Mr. Compaoré's ruling party has dominated the political scene continuously, and in 2007 widened its margin of control over parliament even further.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has been in office the longest, since 1981. And while there are periodic elections, Mr. Mubarak's party has kept any real opposition at bay. Municipal elections were held on 8 April — just two days after the anti-price demonstrations. The ruling party fielded 53,000 candidates. Although the main opposition party, the Muslim Brotherhood, initially nominated 7,754 candidates, the electoral authorities approved only 20 to actually run.

In these countries, demonstrators commonly saw the lack of political change as one factor in the widening economic gap between those with access to power and the majority of the poor. As one protester in Guinea told a reporter, that country is "super-rich," with extensive mineral and forest reserves, but is "held hostage by predators."

However tightly controlled some of these political systems may appear to be, the extent of the protests suggests that ordinary citizens are starting to get a sense of their potential political power and are no longer willing to remain silent. Since 2007 in Guinea, there has been an "awakening of the people's conscience," says Rabiatou Serah Diallo, secretary-general of the National Confederation of Workers.

Opposition leaders seem to have been encouraged by the hasty economic policy concessions of some governments. They also have taken heart from television and radio reports of demonstrations in neighbouring countries. In Egypt, new technologies have facilitated protest. The calls for a general strike were circulated widely by mass cell phone messages.

Between repression and dialogue

In the face of such challenges, most governments responded with police or military force. Hundreds of protesters were arrested in Burkina Faso, and scores were quickly tried and sentenced. In addition to those killed in Cameroon, at least 1,500 people were arrested by the government's own tally, and many more according to the opposition. In Egypt, about 100 protesters were injured, and about 250 arrested. Senegal's demonstrations were not as large as those held elsewhere, but two consumers' leaders who were arrested accused the police of severe brutality, including the use of electric prods.

And although Senegal is widely acknowledged to have one of Africa's liveliest and least restricted media, riot police reacted during the demonstrations by seizing video tape from one private television station and still images from photographers, while the authorities ordered another television station to stop broadcasting film of the protests. In Cameroon and Morocco, journalists were beaten and media outlets were temporarily shut down.

But once the demonstrations appeared to have been contained, the governments in Cameroon, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania and elsewhere responded along a different track. Besides declaring various measures aimed at bringing down consumer prices — and even at promoting greater domestic food production over the coming years — they initiated consultations with trade unions, merchants' associations and consumers' organizations.

Such efforts at dialogue appeared intended to elicit a measure of public understanding with explanations of what was being done to reduce prices — and what the governments are not able to do. They also projected an accommodating image, showing that government officials are not oblivious to their citizens' concerns.

Although protests against high prices continued in Burkina Faso and Senegal since those governments opened talks with trade unions and other civil associations, the demonstrations have been more orderly and less prone to violence than the initial outbursts. In other countries where no major protests have occurred recently, including the Central African Republic and Ethiopia, authorities have acted preemptively to dampen price increases. Such initiatives indicate that taking popular grievances seriously can be an important step in meeting the challenge of high prices. ■

Soaring food prices

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Malawi, where the government disregarded the advice of donors and doubled the country's maize harvest with a $60 mn fertilizer-and-seeds subsidy programme for smallholders in 2006. The government also erected 600 improved locally manufactured maize storage silos over the past year to reduce losses to rot and pests.

In Kenya a $5 mn international loan guarantee programme has secured some $50 mn in private-sector loans to family farmers to allow them to purchase improved seeds, fertilizers and other inputs. Over the long term, Kenyan Agriculture Minister William Ruto told the Rome summit, "We believe the most comprehensive way to deal with high food prices, hunger and poverty is to invest in agriculture and raise food production." Kenya is exploring with other East African governments the feasibility of building a fertilizer factory to meet the region's growing demand, he said, and strengthen cross-border cooperation in agriculture.

But too often, noted the FAO's Mr. Diouf, Africa's development partners have failed to support such efforts. International investment for rural development declined, he said, while subsidies for Northern farmers topped $370 bn per year, arms spending reached $1,200 bn in 2006 and biofuels subsidies diverted 100 mn tonnes of cereals from human consumption into the petrol tanks of the more fortunate.

"It was only when the destitute and those excluded from the banquets of the rich took to the streets to voice their discontent and despair," Mr. Diouf noted, that the world took notice. "The problem of food security is a political one," he concluded. "The time for talking is long past. Now is the time for action." ■

Africa seeks 'green' cash

from page 3

River. But that too presented problems. Local authorities lacked the engineering, management and financial skills to design and implement the project. And its small size — it served just 4,000 homes — made it unattractive to private investors in the absence of outside funding.

Yet because the project would prevent the release of about 36,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases per year, compared with existing energy sources, it qualified for inclusion in the CDM. With technical help from the Ugandan government and financial assistance from Finland and the Netherlands, the project received final approval by the CDM in 2005. The resulting CERs generated annually are sold on world carbon markets to help defray construction and operating costs — contributing to clean and sustainable development in Uganda and cheaper compliance with the Kyoto Protocol for buyers in the North.

For Africa and other poor regions struggling to cope with climate change, such financing is vital. Scientists argue that global warming is damaging Earth's climate faster than expected, and a severe shortfall in funds is hampering African efforts to cope.

Unfortunately, the success of the West Nile CDM project is the exception rather than the rule in Africa. According to researchers for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which oversees the CDM, Africa accounts for only about 3 per cent of the more than 1,000 CDM-approved projects globally — and half those are in South Africa, where sophisticated industrial and financial infrastructure lends itself to the complex CDM approval process. The rest of sub-Saharan Africa accounts for just a handful of CDM projects.

Poor business climate

Africa's difficulties in attracting CDM projects are similar to those that have hampered the continent's efforts to land purely commercial investments. Those include a lack of infrastructure and skilled labour, high poverty rates, limited financial resources, a shortage of the management and technical skills needed to meet CDM standards, weak institutions, corruption and political instability. Together, such shortcomings have saddled the region with a reputation as a difficult place to do business.

Many African governments and environmentalists also note that the CDM's rules favour pollution-reducing projects rather than those that could help Africa cope with climate changes, such as irrigation schemes, soil conservation and flood-control programmes. Such projects were instead to be met by the Kyoto Protocol's Adaptation Fund, financed in part by a 2 per cent levy on CDM credits.

The slow pace of approvals is another problem. The World Bank noted in a 2008 report that while CDM regulators have signed off on some 1,000 projects since the mechanism was launched in 2005, an additional 2,000 projects are still under evaluation, creating delays and discouraging investors.

CDM officials told *Africa Renewal* that efforts are underway to streamline application procedures and speed up the approval process. But they also said that the time-consuming vetting proposals undergo is necessary if the CDM is to be a credible tool for greenhouse gas reductions.

Although CDM credits are not the only kind traded on world carbon markets, they are coveted for their quality and fetch higher prices. Before qualifying for CDM credits, projects must demonstrate that they are compatible with sustainable development plans by the host country, that they will produce verifiable emissions reductions and that they would not be built without the added financing of emissions credits, a requirement known as "additionality." Only after such conditions are met are credits issued, a process that can take up to two years.

According to the World Bank, in 2007 the CDM generated some $13 bn in emissions credit sales, part of an overall carbon market worth $64 bn — more than double the size of the market the previous year. CDM spokesman David Abbass told *Africa Renewal* that with world carbon markets projected to generate $100 bn by 2012, the year the Kyoto Protocol expires, it is vital that Africa attract its fair share.

"The accelerating growth of carbon markets resulting from the UN-brokered climate change agreement," the head of the UN Environment Programme, Achim Steiner, told a meeting of African bankers in

Panos / Stefan Boness

Irrigation canal in Eritrea: The CDM's current rules do not favour financing projects to help Africa adapt to climate change, such as irrigation schemes.

May 2007, "represents a significant economic and development opportunity for Africa."

Nairobi Framework

In late 2006, a coalition of UN and development agencies, including the UN Environment Programme, the UN Development Programme, the UNFCCC Secretariat, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, launched an initiative to help Africa take greater advantage of the CDM. Known as the Nairobi Framework and inaugurated by then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the initiative initially is focusing on:

- Building local and national technical capacity to design and implement CDM projects
- Expanding awareness of CDM opportunities among African and international government and private-sector leaders
- Encouraging greater cooperation among African governments in attracting green investments
- Strengthening coordination among governmental and non-governmental agencies to streamline and shorten project timelines and approval delays.

In 2007 the Framework launched an Internet-based CDM Bazaar (www.cdmbazaar.net) to bring project developers together with investors; to provide a venue for engineers, marketing firms and other service providers; and to highlight the opportunities for CDM activities in Africa and other developing areas. The Framework will convene an all-Africa carbon forum in Senegal in late 2008 to further highlight the potential of Africa for green development investors.

Efforts are also underway to reform the CDM's rules. At a December 2007 climate change meeting in Bali, governments agreed to explore ways to expand the CDM into areas previously excluded from eligibility, such as forest preservation, and to simplify application and compliance rules. The World Bank is expanding its efforts to promote CDM projects in developing countries by launching a guarantee programme to reassure Northern investors of the security of African CERs, and buying and selling carbon credits itself (see page 20).

Impatience mounts

But with an ambitious 2009 deadline for agreement on a successor treaty to the Kyoto pact, there are fears that developing countries will balk at stronger action against climate change if they feel they have been short-changed by the current accord.

Addressing the UN climate meeting in Bali on behalf of the African delegations, the Nigerian government pointedly noted that funds to help Africa cope with climate change often come with conditions governments find difficult to meet, and that international "capacity-building" programmes produce little in the absence of resources. "There is too much emphasis on seminars, workshops and needs assessment," the government stated. "For how long will our needs continue to be assessed?" In the meantime, it concluded, "The suffering of our people continues."

The man charged with guiding negotiations for a successor to Kyoto, UNFCCC head Yvo de Boer, told a reporter for *US News and World Report* in early 2008 that a North-South split over climate change is the single greatest threat to progress. "On the one hand the question: Will rich nations really show the type of leadership required for poor countries to engage," he said. "Secondly, can we mobilize the finance and technology that will make it possible for developing countries to engage?"

Developing countries are willing to join the industrialized world in limiting emissions, Mr. de Boer continued, "but for them to do that, technology, financial resources and capacity-building have to be provided by rich nations." Accommodating the interests of rich and poor, he added, "will require striking a delicate balance."

Marshall Plan needed

In the view of some of Africa's leading climate scientists and environmental officials, far more needs to be done to match the continent's needs with resources.

Peter Arnold Inc. / Ron Giling

A dried up river bed in Mali.

Richard Muyungi, deputy director for the environment in the office of the Tanzanian vice-president, told *Africa Renewal* that the cost of climate change in that East African country, among the world's poorest, is already running into the billions of dollars and slowing economic growth.

"Our energy sector has been most affected," Mr. Muyungi said. He noted that drought has sharply reduced reservoir levels for hydroelectric power, causing difficulties throughout the economy. "Many of our coastal islands are threatened by rising sea levels" from melting polar icecaps, he explained, while higher temperatures on land are imposing costly new demands on the national health system. "We now have malaria around Mt. Kilimanjaro" as a result of climate change, he observed. "We never had that before."

The severity of the drought, and mounting concerns about the impact of climate change on food prices, Mr. Muyungi said, have already forced the government to shift

World Bank climate funds under fire

The World Bank is moving aggressively into the booming global trade in pollution credits that are intended to help reduce the amount of industrial greenhouse gases, often called carbon emissions, that contribute to global warming. Since the launch of the Bank's pilot Prototype Carbon Fund in 1999, the institution has been operating or managing 10 separate carbon-trading facilities, including:

- The Community Development Carbon Fund to finance small-scale clean energy projects
- The BioCarbon Fund to invest in forestry and agriculture projects that absorb and sequester greenhouse gases
- The Umbrella Carbon Fund, which pools financing for purchases of credits from large emissions-reductions projects
- The Carbon Fund for Europe, a joint venture with the European Investment Bank
- The national carbon funds of Spain, Italy and Denmark, and two funds for the Netherlands.

At the end of 2007 the Bank announced plans for two more funds: a Carbon Partnership Facility to coordinate emissions-trading projects with national and regional development programmes and a Forest Carbon Partnership Facility to finance preservation of existing forests in developing countries. This growing stable of funds, says the Bank, is "building opportunities for developing countries to access carbon finance in support of low-carbon development goals."

The Bank has also proposed that it manage another two funds to be financed largely by the US, UK and Japan. One would underwrite clean technology transfer and the other would fund climate change adaptation in developing countries. These funds would have assets of $5–11 bn, dwarfing other UN climate change resources and making the Bank the largest single source of climate financing. The proposal was made at a meeting of the "Group of 20" largest economies that was held outside Tokyo in March.

Stiff opposition

But the proposals have encountered stiff opposition from developing countries and non-government environmental organizations, which argue that the funds will come at the expense of UN climate efforts, duplicate existing institutions and impose additional donor conditions on developing countries.

Ms. Bernaditas Muller, a Philippines government official and representative of the developing nations' Group of 77, argued that the funds are "outside" the agreed UN climate convention and would "undermine the efforts at the convention on climate resources." She called instead for donor funds to be channeled through UN climate change bodies, which she argued are more representative.

South African Environment Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk complained that developing countries have been kept in the dark about the new funds. South Africa sees no reason to establish "piecemeal" parallel financing streams outside the UN, he said. "We prefer not to have a proliferation of funding from other multilateral agencies." He also demanded assurances that donor contributions would represent additional resources, not money reprogrammed from existing development aid budgets.

'Potentially detrimental'

The Indian government described the funds as "potentially detrimental" to the fight against climate change. The multilateral financial institutions have "asymmetrical governance structures" in which donors exercise greater control. As a result, "parallel funding channels could further marginalize developing countries from having a stake in the fight against climate change."

Since then, World Bank spokesman Roger Morier told *Africa Renewal*, the Bank has substantially revised the original proposals, most importantly by diluting donor control of the funds' boards of directors by allocating an equal number of seats to developed and developing countries. The move has won qualified praise from some critics, including the development group Oxfam International.

But recent reports that some UK contributions to the funds will be in the form of loans instead of grants, possibly adding to future debt burdens, and continued concerns about funding streams outside the agreed UN climate framework seem likely to keep the proposals controversial. In early June a coalition of 121 non-government environmental and development groups termed loans to poor countries for climate change programmes "highly inappropriate." They noted that "rich countries are overwhelmingly responsible for climate change" and should therefore bear the costs. A final decision on the funds is expected later in 2008.

spending from long-term sustainable development programmes to emergency relief. It has also had to downgrade its earlier estimate of 6–7 per cent economic growth for 2008. "We cannot estimate the total cost, as we don't know how severe the impact will be. It is already impossible to grow cotton and maize in some areas. How much the losses will be is harder to say."

Tanzania is collaborating with UN agencies and bilateral donors to develop a national climate change action plan and is working within the Nairobi Framework to attract CDM funding, Mr. Muyungi explained. "But the procedures are too complicated. Africa is already behind in terms of foreign direct investment and the same problems stand in the way of CDM projects." The CDM needs a much more comprehensive and strategic approach to Africa, he concluded, if it is going to help the region cope. "We really need a Marshall Plan."

Reforming the system

Ogunlade Davidson, co-chair of the working group on greenhouse gas reductions of the UN intergovernmental climate change panel and dean of postgraduate studies at the University of Sierra Leone, is even blunter. The CDM, he told *Africa Renewal*, has been "hijacked" by the private sector and transformed into a profit-generating centre instead of a vehicle for greenhouse gas reductions.

Under the current system, Mr. Davidson says, investors are able to "piggyback" carbon emissions credits onto commercial projects in countries like China and India that are already attracting high levels of foreign investment. That is one reason so many CDM projects are located in industrializing developing countries, he declares, and so few in sub-Saharan Africa.

Even more alarming, Mr. Davidson observes, is the failure of the CDM rules to require domestic greenhouse gas reductions in developed countries, which are the largest buyers of carbon credits. "It's a major flaw. Developed countries need to reduce their emissions by 90 per cent. We need more drastic action. Market forces alone cannot deliver the emissions reductions that are needed. Markets caused the problem in the first place."

The CDM can be improved through reform of its procedures, tighter requirements for domestic emissions reductions and expansion of the kinds of projects eligible for financing, Mr. Davidson says. The mechanism also needs to be supplemented with new instruments, such as a protocol to make advanced technologies available to developing countries at discounted rates, government action to raise the cost of greenhouse emissions to encourage domestic reductions and more funding for the Adaptation Fund.

A 2 per cent levy on even $100 bn in annual sales of carbon credits, he points out, would only generate $2 bn a year — not nearly enough to make a difference. "The requirement is huge," he emphasizes. "Most adaptation finance will have to come via development aid. It must become mainstreamed into the development process."

Capacity building programmes like those offered by the Nairobi Framework are also necessary, he adds, but should be channelled into existing African science-and-technology and management training institutions.

NEPAD: mainstreaming green

Integrating climate change and environmental protection into African development programmes is central to the environmental action plan of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the pan-African blueprint adopted in 2001. The environment plan, launched in 2003, sets three broad priorities for African governments and their development partners:

- Identification of the regions and people most vulnerable to climate shocks and creation of monitoring and early-warning systems
- Formulation of detailed national and regional response plans, including disaster emergency measures, flexible development programmes and long-term coping strategies
- Acquisition of practical experience through demonstration and pilot projects to "show the way forward" in sustaining economic development while simultaneously adapting to climate shocks.

To date, about two dozen African countries have developed national climate change action plans, and NEPAD-supported programmes to combat the expansion of the Sahara Desert and protect the forests of Central and West Africa are beginning to show results. Many of NEPAD's other proposals, including the construction of a continental electricity grid, would also go far towards "greening" Africa's development and easing poverty.

But for now, many NEPAD projects remain outside the scope of global climate funding, and promised increases in Northern development aid for Africa have not materialized. Until financing is found, many of NEPAD's green development plans will remain on the shelf and Africa's ability to cope with climate change will be limited.

'Pollution permit'?

Concerns about the economic and environmental effectiveness of carbon trading as a weapon in the fight against climate change are not limited to Africa. Many environmental activists and some economists have opposed carbon trading on principle. They argue that allowing polluting industries in developed countries to count emissions credits against their mandatory reduction quotas constitutes a market in "pollution permits" and undermines incentives for the industrial North to make the deep cuts necessary to halt global warming.

Uncertainty about the shape of a post-Kyoto climate pact is also roiling the carbon markets. Business analysts predict that investors are likely to reduce their purchases of credits until there is greater clarity about the future. This is likely to depress world prices for carbon credits at a time when many climate scientists argue that prices are already too low to provide strong financial incentives to cut emissions in industrialized countries.

For Africa, however, fixing the market's flaws may be less urgent than finding a way into it. "When Africa only has 30 CDM projects out of 1,000," Mr. Muyungi noted drily, "there is a problem." ■

Panos / Fred Hoogervorst

Carrying a tree seedling at a mangrove rehabilitation project in Kenya. Africa's difficult investment climate makes it hard to attract private financing for sustainable development initiatives.

Clean Development Mechanism projects

(percentage of total)

India	31.96
China	20.52
Brazil	12.56
Mexico	9.84
Malaysia	2.62
Chile	2.06
Africa	**2.34**

Source: UN Africa Renewal from UNFCCC data, 2008

AFRICA AGENDA

3-8 August 2008, Mexico City (Mexico) — International AIDS Conference. Organized by the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS. Contact Robin Ridley, e-mail <ridleyr@unaids.org>, website <www.aids2008.org>

20–22 August 2008, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) — Entrepreneurship Development in Africa. Organized by the Ronald H. Brown Institute for Sub-Saharan Africa. Tel (27) 12 420-2658, fax (27) 12 420-5971, e-mail <rbi@up.ac.za> or <joyce.nyandoro@up.ac.za>, website <www.rbi-ssa.org>

27–28 August 2008, Abuja (Nigeria) — International TB Conference: Integrated Management to Avert Pandemic in the Developing Countries. Organized by the Africa Health Research Organization. Contact Abubakar Yaro, tel (44) 7939848695, e-mail <abubakar@ahro.kabissa.org>, website <www.ahrotb2008.org>

28–29 August 2008, Oslo (Norway) — 3rd Annual African Green Revolution Conference. Contact Thorleif Enger, e-mail <thorleif.enger@africangreenrevolutionconference.com>, website <www.africangreenrevolutionconference.com>

2–4 September 2008, Accra (Ghana) — Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. Organized by the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. E-mail <secretariat@accrahlf.net>, website <www.accrahlf.net>

22 September 2008, UNHQ, New York (US) — General Assembly's High-Level Meeting on Africa. To review all commitments made to Africa in order to comprehensively address the continent's special development needs. Contact Patrick Hayford, tel (1) 212 963 3461, e-mail <hayford@un.org>, website <www.un.org/africa/osaa/>

22–26 September 2008, Nairobi (Kenya) — 1st All Africa Congress on Biotechnology. Organized by the African Biotechnology Stakeholders Forum and the African Union. Contact Felix M'mboyi, tel (254) 20 4444 558, cell (254) 720 223 244 / (254) 734 333 283, fax (254) 20 444 8762, e-mail <fmmboyi@absfafrica.org>, website <www.absfafrica.org/>

2–3 October 2008, Porto (Portugal) —Water in Africa: Hydro-Pessimism or Hydro-Optimism? Organized by the Center of African Studies. Contact Ana Elisa Cascão, tel /fax (22) 607 71 41, e-mail <ceaup@letras.up.pt>, website <www.africanos.eu/ceaup>

5–9 October 2008, Bali (Indonesia) — International Scientific Conference on Tropical Rainforests and Agroforests under Global Change. E-mail <info@globalchange-2008.org>, website <www.globalchange-2008.org>

6–8 October 2008, Washington, DC (US) — 3rd US-Africa Infrastructure Conference. Organized by the Corporate Council on Africa and this year focusing on information and communications technologies. Contact Vivienne Sequeira, tel (1) 202 835 1117, fax (1) 202 835 1115, e-mail <vsequeira@africacncl.org>, website <www.africacncl.org>

WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE

2 June 2008, Las Vegas, NV (USA) — Rapaport Fair Trade Conference. Involving members of the jewelry industry with NGOs and African development representatives to examine fair trade guidelines. E-mail <fairtrade@diamonds.net>, website <www.diamonds.net>

7–12 June 2008, Johannesburg (South Africa) — African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). Tel (254) 20 762 4289 / 4287, e-mail <amcensec@unep.org>, website <www.unep.org/roa/Amcen>

20–21 June 2008, Minneapolis (US) — 3rd African Women in the Diaspora Conference. Sponsored by the Minnesota African Women's Association. E-mail <mawa0302@yahoo.com>, website <www.mawanet.org>

30 June–3 July 2008, Nantes (France) — 3rd World Forum on Human Rights. Tel (33) 2 51 83 70 10, website <www.spidh.org>

AFRICA BOOKS

Sudden and Disruptive Climate Change: Exploring the Real Risks and How We Can Avoid Them, eds. Michael C. MacCracken, Frances Moore and John C. Topping, Jr. (Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, UK, 2007; 320 pp; pb £24.95, $39.95; hb £85, $166)

Hanging by a Thread: Cotton, Globalization and Poverty in Africa, eds. William G. Moseley and Leslie C. Gray (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, USA, 2008; 297 pp; pb $24)

La Chinafrique: Pékin à la conquête du continent noir by Michel Beuret and Serge Michel (Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, Paris, France, 2008; 348 pp; €19.50)

African Development: Making Sense of the Issues and Actors by Todd J. Moss (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, USA, 2007; 275 pp; pb $22.50, £13.95; hb $55)

Ivoiriens de l'étranger: Quelle politique de l'Etat et quelles contributions de la diaspora au processus de développement de la Côte d'Ivoire?, eds. Claude Koudou and Vincent Lohouri (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2008; 156 pp; €15.50)

The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability by James Gustave Speth (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, USA, 2008; 320 pp; pb $28)

Darfur: A New History of a Long War by Julie Flint and Alex de Waal (Zed Books, London, UK, 2008; 336 pp; pb £12.99, $18; hb £32.99)

Des femmes écrivent l'Afrique: L'Afrique de l'Ouest et le Sahel, eds. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Aminata Diaw (Karthala, Paris, France, 2007; 610 pp; €32)

Global Change: Enough Water for All? by José L. Lozán et al (Wissenschaftliche Auswertungen, Hamburg, Germany, 2007; 384 pp; pb €35)

Land and Sustainable Development in Africa by Kojo Sebastian Amanor and Sam Moyo (Zed Books, London, UK, 2007; 370 pp; pb £17.99; hb £60)

Between Faith and History: A Biography of J. A. Kufuor by Ivor Agyeman-Duah (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, USA, 2007; 440 pp; hb $35)

Libres propos sur les réformes juridiques au Gabon: Dans le tourbillon de la mondialisation by Jean-Pierre Akumbu M'Oluna (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2008; 194 pp; €19.50)

Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea by Ricardo Oliveira (Columbia University Press, New York, NY, USA, 2007; 400 pp, pb $32.50; hb $79.50)

Pauvreté des ménages et accès à l'éducation en Afrique de l'Ouest: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana et Togo, ed. Bernard Kouassi (Karthala, Paris, France, 2008; 179 pp; €19)

The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs, eds. Alfred Nhema and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Ohio University Press, Ohio, USA, 2008; 288 pp; pb $24.95)

Pourquoi l'Afrique pleure et s'enfonce? Les vraies causes et solutions de la misère africaine by Roland A.Y. Holou (Trafford Publishing, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, 2007; 252 pp; pb $27, C$31.05, €21.05, £13.96)

Savoirs et politiques de développements. Questions en débat à l'aube du XXIe siècle, eds. V.Geronimi et al (Karthala, Paris, France, 2008; 264 pp; €25)

Sociologie générale et africaine: Les sciences sociales et les mutations des sociétés africaines by Albert Muluma Munanga G.T. (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2008; 328 pp; €32.50)

Toward Full and Decent Employment, eds. José Antonio Ocampo and Jomo K.S. (Zed Books, London, UK, 2008; 352 pp; pb £17.99)

Technologies de l'information et de la communication, éducation et post-développement en Afrique: Entre mythe de la technique et espoirs de progrès au Burkina Faso by Zacharia W. Tiemtoré (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2008; 228 pp; €22)

Vision pour une monnaie forte: Plaidoyer pour une nouvelle politique monétaire au Congo by Noël K. Tshiani (L'Harmattan, Paris, France, 2008; 306 pp; €28.50)

Penser les indicateurs de richesse by Dominique Méda (Editions Flammarion, Paris, France, 2008; 224 pp; €6)

African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine, eds. Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, USA, 2007; 275 pp; pb $23.50, £14.95; hb $58, £36.95)

AFRICA IN BRIEF

UN, donors fight hunger in Africa's Horn

Drought, conflict and soaring food prices have left over 14 million people in the Horn of Africa dependent on emergency food aid, and humanitarian agencies report that they are struggling to cope. Ethiopia has been hardest hit, with 10.4 million people needing aid, followed by war-torn Somalia with 2.6 million, and 1.7 million people in Eritrea.

In June the World Food Programme (WFP) reported a shortfall of nearly 39,000 tonnes of food in its Ethiopia programme and noted that some feeding programmes had been interrupted by shortages of basic supplies. The agency estimated it will need an additional $33 mn to continue operations until the end of the year. In Somalia food programmes have been severely hampered by fighting between the government and its allies, including Ethiopia, and rebel forces. Over 800,000 people have fled the capital, Mogadishu, and the number of Somalis in need of food aid is expected to reach 3.5 million by year end. WFP reports it has raised barely half of the $250 mn required for 2008.

International aid appeals come as the troubled region's governments devote an increasing share of national budgets to defence. At the end of 2007 the Ethiopian government announced a $50 mn increase in its military budget to about $400 mn, citing increased tensions with its neighbours and the cost of its military presence in neighbouring Somalia. "As a result", Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi told parliament, "we had to build our defence capabilities." ■

Panos / Sven Torfinn

An Ethiopian child with a nutrient-rich drink provided by relief agencies.

Africa backs ban on cluster bombs

Thirty-three African states were among the 111 countries to sign the 30 May 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions that ban the manufacture, sale, use or stockpiling of the weapons. The munitions, dropped by aerial bombs or missiles or fired from artillery, scatter small explosives over a wide area. Unexploded bomblets can linger in conflict zones for months or years and are particularly dangerous to children, who sometimes mistake them for toys or food. The ban was welcomed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who noted that through international cooperation "we can help free communities from the hidden horrors of these weapons."

According to the non-governmental Cluster Munition Coalition, 14 African armies are currently equipped with the weapons, and must eliminate their stockpiles within eight years. The coalition estimates that the munitions have been used in conflicts in 10 African countries, including Sudan, Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The treaty also calls on governments and the international community to aid the victims of cluster munitions attacks. ■

World Bank business ratings under fire

Ghana and Kenya were among the 10 countries with the most improved regulatory climates in 2007, the World Bank reported in its annual *Doing Business* survey, produced jointly with the International Finance Corporation (the Bank's private sector lending arm). The survey rates 178 countries by 10 categories of business regulations.

But the survey's methods and assumptions have come under fire from the Bank's own internal watchdog agency, the Independent Evaluation Group. The group says the report reflects an aversion to most types of regulation of businesses, is biased against labour, lacks transparency in its methodology and tends to overstate its findings. It found that seven of the survey's ten indicators assumed that regulation was always undesirable, "irrespective of the potential benefits." The survey "measures the costs but not the benefits of regulation," it noted.

The *Doing Business* labour criteria, evaluators found, followed the letter of International Labour Organization conventions, "but not always their spirit, insofar as it gives lower scores to countries that have chosen policies for greater job protection." Its tax criteria, the review said, judged countries' overall fiscal policies in assigning scores, not just business tax rates. The lack of transparency about its reporting sources and overstated claims about the relevance of its findings have provoked "considerable criticism" from stakeholders, the evaluation concluded, and there appears to be "no statistically significant relationship" between the indicators and economic performance. ■

AFRICA WATCH

ENVIRONMENT

Initiative to save Congo forests

Key donor institutions made initial pledges of $216 mn to help save the vast forest areas of Central Africa's Congo River basin at the mid-June launch of the Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF). Africa has numerous development priorities, CBFF co-chair Wangari Maathai, a Nobel Prize laureate from Kenya, noted at the event in London. "Africa has to make very tough choices, and she has to feed herself. But it's very important we do not sacrifice indigenous forests for biofuels or any other alternatives."

More than 50 million people live in the Congo basin forest region, which covers about 2 mn square kilometres of territory across 10 countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, it is home to 10,000 species of plants, 1,000 species of birds and 400 species of mammals. But these forests are threatened by human activities, such as agriculture and road construction, as well as by climate change. The UN estimates that if the current rate of deforestation is not halted, some two-thirds of the forests will be gone by 2040.

Donald Kaberuka, president of the African Development Bank, which is hosting the CBFF, noted that African countries need stronger capacities to manage their forests. "If we succeed, and we must, the people of the Congo Basin will have made a major contribution to humanity." ■

HAZARDOUS WASTE

Senegal deaths highlight toxic dangers

Officials of the World Health Organization (WHO) have called for emergency international aid to clean up dangerously high levels of toxic lead following the deaths of 18 children in the NGagne Diaw section of Dakar. WHO investigators called in by the Senegalese government found lead concentrations many times higher than safe limits in the area, where residents salvage and sell lead from disused car batteries. About 1,000 people were affected. The UN health agency has called for urgent international assistance to local authorities to decontaminate the area and help treat the victims, many of whom have suffered brain damage and severe nervous system disorders.

The incident has renewed calls for stricter controls on the recycling and disposal of toxic waste in African and other developing countries, where oversight is generally weak and few companies have the expertise to handle hazardous materials. At least 15 people died and thousands more were sickened in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 2007 after a foreign oil company dumped contaminated wastes in open pits.

In late June, African efforts to pass an international ban on exports of toxic wastes were defeated by the US, Japan and other industrialized countries at a meeting in Bali of signatories to the Basel Convention, which governs the international movement of hazardous waste. ■

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. **Alain Le Roy** of France has been appointed UN under-secretary-general for peacekeeping operations, replacing Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno, also of France. Mr. Le Roy was recently counsellor at the Cour des comptes (the French audit office). His extensive experience in public administration, management and international affairs includes postings as deputy to the UN special coordinator for Sarajevo, a UN regional administrator in Kosovo and French ambassador to Madagascar.

UN / Mark Garten

Mr. **Miguel d'Escoto Brockman** of Nicaragua has been elected president of the United Nations General Assembly, for its 63rd session opening in September. He served as his country's foreign minister from 1979 to 1990 and in February 2007 he was appointed special senior adviser, with the rank of minister, for foreign policies and boundary issues to Nicaragua's current President Daniel Ortega Saavedra.

UN / Eskinder Debebe

The UN Secretary-General has appointed Ms. **Inés Alberdi** of Spain as executive director of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Ms. Alberdi has more than 25 years of professional experience on issues of gender, including as a senior adviser on women in development at the Inter-American Development Bank. Ms. Alberdi replaces Noeleen Heyzer, who last year assumed the position of executive secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

UN / Evan Schneider

Mr. **Said Djinnit** of Algeria has been appointed by the UN Secretary-General as special representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA). Mr. Djinnit previously served as the commissioner for peace and security at the Africa Union, among other positions there, including as chairman of one of the task forces that helped transform the previous Organization of African Unity into the African Union. He has also served in various diplomatic missions for his country. At UNOWA, he replaces General Lamine Cissé, who was officer-in-charge since September 2007.

Mr. **Tayé-Brook Zerihoun** of Ethiopia has been named the UN Secretary-General's special representative in Cyprus and head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Since August 2004 he was the Secretary-General's principal deputy special representative in the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), and in October 2007 was appointed chief UN mediator for the Darfur peace talks. He previously was a director on Africa in the UN's Department of Political Affairs.